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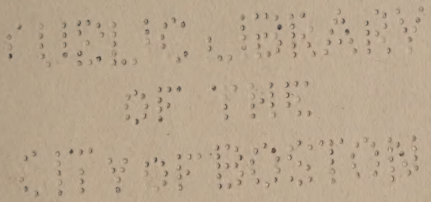
MOSES MICHAEL HAYS



Lecture Delivered by Benjamin A. Levy, Esq.
Senior Deacon, Shawmut Lodge, A. F. & A. M.
February 22, 1917, at Masonic Temple, Boston

Albert H. Lawcon Secretary

WE are celebrating today the birth of the Father of our Country, George Washington, and it is indeed most fitting that we also do homage to one whom we may properly term the Father of Modern Masonry in Massachusetts, "Moses Michael Hays." Washington unified the American forces and brought about a United States of America, while Moses Michael Hays brought about a union of the conflicting forces in Masonry, as it was through his untiring efforts that a United Masonry was constructed in Massachusetts.

Our order is founded upon those principles which endeavor to improve and benefit mankind and we particularly strive to carry them into practice in all spheres of life. Moses Michael Hays personified those principles.

I shall endeavor to present him first in his domestic and civic activities; second, his place in the commercial world; and third, his work as a Mason.

Moses Michael Hays, whose portrait adorns the northwest corner of the lodge, was born in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1739. His father, Judah, came to America in 1768 and established himself and family in Newport, Rhode Island. He was apparently a man of wealth, for he is reputed to have been the owner of a sixteen gun ship called the "Duke of Cumberland." Little is recorded of the life of Judah Hays and therefore little is known of the early life of Moses Michael Hays.

As the son of devout Jewish parents he never forgot his faith and to the very end was actively engaged and interested in all matters affecting his religion. His first residence in

Boston, so far as I have been able to trace it, was at the lower end of Middle Street, what is now known as Hanover Street. Middle Street then extended from Union Street to Fleet Street. From the early directories I find the address of his son, Judah Hays, given as 13 Middle Street, but it has been impossible to trace the exact manner in which the numbers ran at that time, though from information received at the City Hall, and from those who are in a position to know, I am informed that it is safe to say that his residence was located a few doors from Union Street, on the right hand side going towards Fleet Street. The numbers in those days were placed in accordance with the English method of numbering streets, beginning on the right hand side and running consecutively and then coming back on the left hand side in the same way.

He had five daughters and one son. His daughters were Rebecca, unmarried, who later died in Boston; Catherine and Slowey, both of whom married and later moved to Richmond, Va.; Judith and Sally, who also married and lived in Virginia, and one son named Judah, who was a merchant at 11 Foster's Wharf and who resided with his father on Middle Street.

Moses Michael Hays was at all times prominent in Jewish affairs for in the records of the Congregation Shearith Israel of New York, we find that for several years he held the position of second Parnas, that is Vice-President. He too, took part in the Jewish colony at Newport, for he was among those who made it possible to erect there the first Jewish Synagogue in the United States, known as the Touro Synagogue, and his body now lies interred in the oldest Jewish cemetery which adjoins this Synagogue at Newport.

His home life was ideal, since we find recorded in the memoirs of Samuel Joseph May, an early Bostonian of note and a learned literary student, a splendid tribute which gives us a more intimate view of his home life. He says, "If the children of my day were taught among other foolish things to dread, if not despise Jews, a very different lesson was impressed upon my young heart. There was but one family of the despised children of the House of Israel resident in Boston, the family of Moses Michael Hays, a man much respected not only on account of his large wealth but for his many personal virtues and the high culture and great excellence of his wife, his son Judah, his daughters, especially Catherine and Slowey. His house far down Hanover Street, then one of the fashionable streets of the town, was the abode of hospitality and his family moved in what were the first circles of society. He and his truly good wife were hospitable, not only to the rich but also to the poor. Many indigent families were fed pretty regularly from his table. They would come especially after his frequent dinner parties and were sure to be made welcome not to the crumbs alone but to the ampler portions of the food that might be left. Always on Saturday he expected a number of friends to dine with him. A full length table was always spread and loaded with luxuries of the season. He loved to see it surrounded by a few regular visitors and others especially invited. My father was a favorite guest and often took me with him, for he was sure I would meet refined company there. Both Uncle and Aunt Hays were fond of children and particularly of me, and I was permitted to stay with them several days and often weeks. I was a child of Christian parents and they took special pains that I should

lose nothing of religious training so long as I was permitted to abide with them. Every night on going to bed I was required to repeat my Christian prayers and hymns to them and I witnessed their prayers, religious exercises and fastings, and was made to feel that they worshipped the Unseen, Almighty and Merciful One. Of course I grew up without any prejudice against Jews or any other religious prejudice because they did not believe as my father and mother."

Every man present has undoubtedly heard of Judah Touro, the great Revolutionary Jewish benefactor. It was through Judah Touro that our present Bunker Hill Monument became possible, because it was he who with Amos Lawrence gave $10,000 each to build this monument. Judah Touro was the son of a sister of Moses Michael Hays, and because he lost his parents when a young man, moved to Boston and lived with his uncle. It was through his uncle's training and home life that Touro acquired his splendid character.

Brother Hays was liberal at all times and to all causes, and did not confine his generosity to the narrow field of his own faith but was deeply interested in all civic and educational institutions, and in all movements. As early as 1780 we find him a benefactor of Harvard College and later we find him actively interested in the Charitable Fire Society of Boston. Through his efforts was instituted the Boston Marine Society which did splendid work in the maintenance and building of light houses and buoys, and other safeguards.

While he held no public office he was recognized as one of our leading citizens, and when George Washington as President of the United States, visited Newport, the Masonic address of welcome was to have been made by Moses Michael

Hays, but he did not carry out the honor so appointed as Washington was not yet a Master Mason. The same characteristics displayed by him in his adherence to his faith, in the building of a most pleasant home life, in his liberal and generous bequests, for all that which tended to the public good, was brought to play in his struggle for a material gain.

His standards of business methods were of the highest character. He was a man of vision and ability. The directories of Boston, as early as 1796, described his business as that of insurance, with offices at 68 State Street, formerly known as King Street, and an examination of the oldest atlas discloses the fact that State Street was then in practically the same relative position as now. He was an underwriter carrying on his own account, the same business which is now being conducted by the large insurance companies.

He established a reputation for honesty and fairness and was among the first to conduct a bonding business in Boston, for we find in the reports of the records of the Commissioner of Boston, 1790, that the Selectmen of Boston accepted him as surety for the then newly elected Treasurer of the City. In the manuscripts of the division of the library of Congress, under date of July 4, 1782, we find his name as surety on a bond for $25,000, for a Massachusetts Brig, the good ship Iris.

He did not confine himself, however, to this particular line. In 1783, a bank was organized for the mutual advantage of the leading merchants of Boston, and the original subscribers' list is headed by Moses Michael Hays. This bank was known as the Massachusetts Bank. Moreover, when a commercial avenue was opened between this country and China, tending towards the development of trade with the Orient, he

organized a trading company and through his marked ability the company achieved great success, and the first ship to embark in that trade was named by him the "Massachusetts." It was this trading company that first opened the Chinese market and made possible the building of our early merchant marine.

His career in business was marked by honest and fair dealings with all, it was therefore natural such efforts met with great success, a success to which he was justly entitled. As in his home and civic life, so in his commercial activities, he found a field for splendid work. He was not that selfish hoarding and money-mad type, but rather of the type of man who, even in the mad rush for material wealth, acquires a reputation for fairness and honesty.

It is therefore not to be wondered that one whose private life and business career was of so high a standard would be found actively interested in this, the greatest fraternal order of its kind, an order which calls to its ranks and has among its members the very best types of American manhood. His Masonic career is one of splendid service, and covers a long period. In 1769 he organized King David's Lodge in New York and was its first Master. Later, in 1769, he moved this Lodge to Newport, Rhode Island, consolidating it with St. John's Lodge, and by so doing revived Masonry there, for at that time St. John's Lodge was slowly but surely passing into oblivion.

The first Master of the combined Lodges was Moses Seizas, another Jew, and for a number of years thereafter St. John's Lodge was maintained and supported by the prominent Jews of Newport.

On December 6, 1768, our Jewish month Kislev, Moses Michael Hays was appointed Deputy Inspector General of North America by Henry Andrew Francken, and upon him devolved the duty of organizing the Scottish Rite bodies in this country, and his original deputation, splendidly preserved, is now in our Masonic Library in this building.

After stating his name and giving his appointment, the deputation states, "He was raised to the highest degree in Masonry and being convinced of his ability in the Royal Art and to recompense him for his assiduity, and the trouble he has taken to give to the perfection of all degrees in Masonry, I hereby give him full power to constitute lodges of Royal Arch and Perfection, also Councils and Grand Councils." This early body of Scottish Rite was organized at Paris and was called the Council of Emperors, East and West. The Council as then organized consisted of twenty-five degrees, the highest being the Sublime Royal Secret.

In 1761, the Council authorized Stephen Morin to propagate the rite in the Western continent and Morin delegated Francken to do this work, who, in turn appointed Moses Michael Hays, Deputy Inspector, with power to appoint other deputies. Joseph M. Meyers was appointed by Hays as Deputy Inspector General of Masonry in the State of Indiana. This same Meyers later married one of Hays' daughters and moved to Virginia, where he propagated the same rite. He also appointed Solomon Bush, Deputy Inspector General for the propagation of that rite at Philadelphia, Isaac DaCosta for South Carolina and Barend M. Spitzer for Georgia.

Our foster mother lodge, The Massachusetts Lodge, to whom Shawmut Lodge owes so much, for the stormy trial days of our early life were made much easier and less troublesome through its help and spirit, undoubtedly was assisted to a very great extent by Moses Michael Hays, who was one of its early members. On November 5, 1782, Moses Michael Hays was proposed for membership in The Massachusetts Lodge by Joseph Warren, Senior Warden and younger brother of General John Joseph Warren. In less than a month thereafter, on December 3, 1782, he was elected Master, the then Master, R. W. Bruce, having been excused from serving, and he continued in office for three successive years, 1783-1784-1785.

On December 16th, thirteen days after his election as Master, a special meeting was called, at which meeting Brother Hays resigned and Brother Warren was elected, but Warren again resigned and Hays was unanimously re-elected Master. He presented the Lodge with three silver-mounted truncheons which were constantly used until the temple was destroyed by fire.

There was but one other Jew who was a member of The Massachusetts Lodge up to 1810, and that was his son Judah. On June 24, 1785, Moses Michael Hays was elected Junior Grand Warden of the Massachusetts Grand Lodge and on June 2, 1786, he was unanimously elected Senior Grand Warden. On July 28, 1787, he was installed as Grand Master of the Massachusetts Grand Lodge and served in this capacity until he effected the union with St. John's Grand Lodge on March 5, 1792.

Up to this time there had existed in Massachusetts two grand lodges, the Massachusetts Grand Lodge and St. John's

Grand Lodge. There was a decided conflict between the two, each working in an opposite direction, though striving for the same thing. Upon his election as Grand Master of Massachusetts Grand Lodge, he, on March 7, 1791, appointed a committee of seven to confer with the officers of St. John's Grand Lodge, to bring about a complete Masonic union of the two forces.

John Warren and Paul Revere, famous characters in American history, were Senior and Junior Wardens of Massachusetts Grand Lodge. As a result a committee was appointed from the St. John's Grand Lodge and a meeting of the two committees was called. Hays was appointed the presiding officer of the convention and through his untiring work, what seemed an impossibility was made a realization, for he successfully brought about a union of the two and saved, what might have resulted in the destruction of Masonry in this Commonwealth. The united lodges were called the Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and its first Grand Master was John Cutler.

The meeting which resulted in this union of forces was held at the tavern called the "Bunch of Grapes," situated on State Street, the final meeting being held at Charlestown.

A testimonial of his offices is recorded in the vote of the New Grand Lodge as follows: "That a committee be ordered to wait upon Worshipful Moses Michael Hays, Esquire, with thanks of this Grand Lodge for his various and distinguished attention to the interests of Masonic Institutions."

Thus lived Moses Michael Hays, in his home, his work shop and his lodge, to the ripe age of sixty-six years for on

May 9, 1805, he died intestate, leaving an estate valued at $80,000, administered by his son Judah. In accordance with his requests his remains were buried at Newport, where in later years a monument was erected by his son, upon which reads the following epitath: "Here reposes the ashes of Moses Michael Hays. He died in Boston, State of Massachusetts, on the 11th day of Sivan, 5565, May 9, 1805, age 66."

His death was mourned by a number of hosts, friends and acquaintances. The Columbian Sentinel, a Boston publication, under date of May 11, 1805, printed the following obituary: "In the character of the deceased there is much worthy of our admiration, much for our imitation. Possessed by nature of a strong intellect, there was a vigor in his conception of men and things which gave a seeming asperity to his conversation which was ever frank and lucid. He walked abroad fearing no man but loving all. Under his roof dwelt hospitality, it was an asylum of friendship, the mansion of peace. He was without guile, despising hypocracy, as he despised meanness. Taking him for all and all, he was a man. In his death society will mourn the loss of a most estimable citizen, his family the kindest of husbands, the most indulgent of fathers. Calm and without a sigh he sunk in the bosom of his Father and our Father, of his God and our God."

Moses Michael Hays has gone but his spirit still lives on, so that his life's work and deeds might act as an inspiration for others to follow. We can learn from his career the lesson of the years well spent and we have a living exemplication that a strict adherence to Masonic teachings can bring a happy and useful life, not to the individual alone but to his family and to the community as well, for it develops and strives to bring forth the best type of manhood.

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